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FUCK IDENTITY, WE NEED SOLIDARITY

Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives

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WE NEED SOLIDARITY

by ~~William Peduto~~
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Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives is a collective of students who have been participating in the movement for black lives and in the struggle of latinx people against state-sanctioned violence. We are anarchists, afropessimists, maoists, and socialists that are united in our desire for an autonomous revolutionary movement.

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Most photos taken by Yasko

Fuck Identity, We Need Solidarity was written collaboratively by a group of people of color, women, and queers – most of whom are students at Point Park University and University of Pittsburgh – in deep solidarity and in the spirit of conversation with anyone, be they anarchist, Marxist, progressive, socialist, or what have you, who is committed to ending oppression and exploitation materially. We'd also like to extend our unconditional solidarity with *all* Pittsburgh protestors who are facing charges.

This is a critique of how privilege theory and cultural essentialism has been a boom in our city and how it has incapacitated antiracist, feminist, and queer organizing in this country by taking identity categories and equating them with culture, and culture with solidarity. This conflation minimizes and misrepresents the severity and structural character of the violence and material deprivation faced by oppressed people, and plays up the division among the people who are out rebelling to a point of making liberation impossible in the long-term.

According to this politics, white supremacy is primarily a individual attitude which individuals can simply choose to discard instead of a material infrastructure which reproduces race at key sites across society – from racially segmented labor markets to the mass murder of trans people. It becomes a thing that can be countered through paying into CashApps as "reparations" rather than something that must be overthrown. Even when this material infrastructure is named, more confrontational tactics which might involve the risk of arrest are deemed "white" and "privileged," while the focus turns back to reforming the behavior and beliefs of individuals. Privilege politics is ultimately rooted in an idealist theory of power which maintains that psychological attitudes are the root cause of oppression and exploitation, and that vague alterations in consciousness will somehow remake oppressive structures.

This form of anti-oppression politics treats demographic categories as coherent, homogeneous "communities" or "cultures." This will argue that identity does not indicate political unity or agreement at all. Identity is not solidarity. The violent domination and subordination we face on the basis of our race, gender, and sexuality do not immediately create a shared political vision. But the uneven impact of oppression across society creates the conditions for the diffuse emergence of autonomous groups organizing on the basis of common experiences, analysis, and

tactics. There is a difference between a politics which places shared cultural identity at the center of its analysis of oppression, and autonomous organizing against forms of oppression which impact members of marginalized groups unevenly.

This will argue that demands for increased cultural recognition have all but failed to stop a rising tide of bigotry and violence in a COVID age of mass death, state repression, and increased paramilitary and fascist organizing. Anti-oppression struggles repeatedly demonstrate that if resistance is even slightly effective, the people who struggle are in danger. But the choice is not between danger and safety, but between the uncertain dangers of revolt and the almost guaranteed certainty of continued violence and deprivation at the hands of the state. In closing we will look at how certain establishment and NGO organizers have used the specter of the former to guarantee the latter, with several "left" groups falling in line behind those organizers.

~ I ~
We Need Autonomous Organizing!

As a group of people of color, women, queers, and poor people coming together to attack a complex matrix of oppression and exploitation, we believe in the absolute necessity of autonomous organizing. By “autonomous” we mean the formation of independent groups of people who face specific forms of exploitation and oppression – including but not limited to people of color, women, queers, trans* people, gender nonconforming people, QPOC. But that doesn't mean we think that we can organize for liberation without crossing racial, gender, and sexual divisions.

Accounts of racial, gender, and sexual oppression as “intersectional” continue to treat identity categories as coherent communities with shared values and ways of knowing the world. No individual or organization can speak for people of color, women, the world’s colonized populations, workers, or any demographic category as a whole – although activists of color, female and queer activists, and labor activists from the Global North routinely and arrogantly claim this right. These “representatives” and institutions speak on behalf of social categories which are not, in fact, communities of shared opinion. This representational politics tends to eradicate any space for political disagreement between individuals subsumed under *the same* identity categories.

We must explore the question of relationship between identity based oppression and capitalism. We must reject a vulgar "class first" politics which argues that racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are derivatives of economic exploitation. It is true however that one can not end, for example, the fact that the US is a white supremacist nation with a legally constructed "white race" which is given some privileges, without organizing the white poor and working class in alliance with BIPOC.

~ II ~
The Situation Today!

Nonprofits Against Revolution

Nonprofits are here to not just provide vital social services in the spaces left by the state's retreat from postwar welfare provisions, but are the 21st century public face of counterinsurgency, except this time speaking the language of civil, women's, and gay rights, charged with preempting political conflict, and spiritually committed to promoting one-sided "dialogue" with armed state bureaucracies. Over the last four decades, a massive nonprofit infrastructure has evolved in order to prevent, whether through force or persuasion, another outbreak of the urban riots and rebellions which spread through northern ghettos in the mid to late 1960s. Racial justice nonprofits, and an entire institutionally funded activist infrastructure, partner with the state to echo the rhetoric of past movements for liberation while implicitly or explicitly condemning their militant tactics.

When we look at Pittsburgh, we see countless examples. Philanthropic organizations like the Heinz Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and many others have grown exponentially not only as a result of the direct privatization of America's New Deal-era social safety net, but to endow many activist organizations and nonprofits. We are the city of Andrew Carnegie, where the library system was literally built to throw off its workers.

"With increasing frequency," Filipino prison abolitionist and professor Dylan Rodriguez argues, "we are party (or participant) to a white liberal 'multicultural'/'people of color' liberal imagination which venerates and even fetishizes the iconography and rhetoric of contemporary Black and Third World liberation movements, and then proceeds to incorporate these images and vernaculars into the public presentation of foundation-funded liberal or progressive organizations. ...[T]hese organizations, in order to protect their nonprofit status and marketability to liberal foundations, actively self-police against members' deviations from their essentially reformist agendas, while continuing to appropriate the language and imagery of historical revolutionaries. Having lived in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1995-2001, which is in many ways the national hub of the progressive 'wing' of the NPIC, I would name some

of the organizations...here, but the list would be too long. Suffice it to say that the nonprofit groups often exhibit(ed) a political practice that is, to appropriate and corrupt a phrase from...Ruth Wilson Gilmore, radical in form, but liberal in content."

On Promoting Voting and Elections

In Pennsylvania some of the most racist policies and "reforms" have been advanced by politicians of color. With an election year, we have had it pushed on us that we should be interested in increasing the racial, gender, and sexual diversity of existing hierarchies of power. When police departments and municipal governments can boast of their diversity and multicultural credentials, we know that there needs to be a radical alternative to this politics of "inclusion." Pittsburgh and neighboring municipalities are perhaps one of the most glaring examples of how people of color have not just participated in but in many instances led – as mayors, police chiefs, and city council members – the assault on poor and working class black and brown populations. Wilkinsburg Mayor Marita Garret, for example, speaks the language of social justice activism and civil rights but her political career in municipal government clearly depends upon satisfying right-wing business interests, corrupt real estate speculators, and a bloated and notoriously brutal police force.

In Pittsburgh there are City Councilmen R. Daniel Lavelle and Ricky Burgess, both who supported increasing funding for militarized policing to control an unruly population, especially poor people of color, and have supported several gentrifying developmental projects. Burgess in particular wantonly ignored the demands of Penn Plaza tenants.

Even the "progressive" politicians like Summer Lee and Olivia Bennet are like the reformist Prime Ministers of Third World democracies, attempting to pass reforms and encouraging passivity and confidence in an undemocratic process, but because the police are like an army uncommitted to following their civilian governments direction, these politicians attempts at reforms are denounced and organized campaigns to oust them make their "electoral path" impossible. Like Allende or Mossadeq, they are disregarded in their reform attempts. The police prowl, categorizing, and profiling, engaging in mass death as

part of their routine business. Making hunters of human beings more diverse is farcical.

Capitalism, Gender, Race

Establishing community mutual aid and self-defense against the violence of emergent mainstream racist movements, against the systematic rape and exploitation of women, and against the systematic murder and/or economic ostracization of transgender and gender-nonconforming people, are all part and parcel of finding greater unity in our common struggle to racism.

We do not believe that autonomous groups will be able to sustain themselves without creating non-state based support networks and without recognizing the mutual implication of white supremacy with capitalism and patriarchy.

Capitalism can neither be reduced to the “predatory practices of Wall Street banks” nor is it something which “intersects” with race, gender, and sexual oppression. Capitalism is a system based on a gendered and racialized division of labor, resources, and suffering. In the US in particular, the celebration of cultural diversity, the recognition of cultural difference, the applauding of women and queers entering the workplace, and the relative decline of overtly racist or sexist beliefs among younger generations, has not improved but instead masked a dramatic deterioration of the material circumstances of racialized populations.

The US economy reproduces racial, gender, and sexual inequality at every level of American society–in housing, healthcare, food sovereignty, education, policing, and prison. The category of “race” is materially recreated and endlessly renewed through these institutions which organize the lives of the undocumented, the imprisoned, the residents of aging ghettos which increasingly function as open-air prisons.

Speaking of capitalism as though it were somehow separable from racist exploitation, gendered violence, and the gamut of complex oppressions facing us in this world, confines antiracist and antipatriarchal struggle to the sphere of culture, consciousness, and individual privilege. The current dominant form of anti-oppression politics in fact diminishes the extent to which racialized and gendered

inequalities are deepening across society despite the generalization of policies promoting linguistic, cultural, gender, and sexual inclusivity.

To destroy this means a great alliance of autonomous groups and cross-identity organizing, not on the basis of guilt or requiring "reparations" from working class and poor whites who simply do not have access to the capital to make such a thing possible, but on the need for mutual liberation of all.

~ III ~
Anti-Oppression Theory & Practice in Pittsburgh has Failed!

Privilege theory and cultural essentialism have incapacitated antiracist, feminist, and queer organizing in this country by confusing identity categories with solidarity and reinforcing stereotypes about the political homogeneity and helplessness of “communities of color.” The category of “communities of color” is itself a recently invented identity category which obscures the central role that antiblack racism plays in maintaining an American racial order and conceals emerging forms of nonwhite interracial conflict.

Understanding racism as primarily a matter of individual racial privilege, and the symbolic affirmation of marginalized cultural identities as the solution to this basic lack of privilege, is the dominant and largely unquestioned form of anti-oppression politics in the US today. According to this politics, whiteness simply becomes one more “culture,” and white supremacy a psychological attitude, instead of a structural position of dominance reinforced through institutions, civilian and police violence, access to resources, and the economy.

Identity categories are treated like they indicate political unity or agreement. Gender, sexual, and economic domination within racial identity categories have typically been described through an additive concept, intersectionality, which continues to assume that political agreement is automatically generated through the proliferation of existing demographic categories. Representing significant political differences as differences in privilege or culture places politics beyond critique, debate, and discussion, leading to many opportunists taking over and coopting the movement.

For too long individual racial privilege has been taken to be the problem, and state or nonprofit managed racial and ethnic “cultural diversity” within existing hierarchies of power imagined to be the solution. It is a well-worn activist formula to point out that “representatives” of different identity categories must be placed “front and center” in struggles against racism, sexism, and homophobia. But this is meaningless without also specifying the content of their politics. The US Army is simultaneously one of the most racially integrated and oppressive

institutions in American society. We must urge all white "accomplices" - there is no singular "Black leadership" and don't feel guilted into following those that claim that they are!

In looking at our anti-oppression activists – who do advance a structural analysis of oppression and yet consistently align themselves with a praxis that reduces the history of violent and radically unsafe antislavery, anticolonial, antipatriarchal, antihomophobic, and anticiscentric freedom struggles to struggles over individual privilege and state recognition of cultural difference. Even when these activists invoke a history of militant resistance and sacrifice, they consistently fall back upon strategies of petitioning the powerful to renounce their privilege or “allow” marginalized populations to lead resistance struggles. This was the case in Pittsburgh, as it was elsewhere.

For too long there has been no alternative to this politics of privilege and cultural recognition, and so rejecting this liberal political framework has become synonymous with a refusal to seriously address racism, sexism, and homophobia in general. Even and especially when people of color, women, and queers imagine and execute alternatives to this liberal politics of cultural inclusion, they are persistently attacked as white, male, and privileged by the cohort that maintains and perpetuates the dominant praxis.

Is it any surprise that unlike Salt Lake City, Portland, Atlanta, and other places where the rebellion continued, there wasn't as powerful of a trend to relinquish power over to political representatives? Pittsburgh is a city with a vast nonprofit industrial complex and a class of professional "community spokespeople" who define the parameters of acceptable political action and debate. This politics of safety must continually project an image of powerlessness and keep communities of color, women, and queers “protected” and confined to speeches and mass rallies rather than active disruption. For this politics of cultural affirmation, suffering is legitimate and recognizable only when it conforms to white middle-class codes of behavior, with each gender in its proper place, and only if it speaks a language of productivity, patriotism, and self-policing victimhood.

And yet the vast majority of us are not “safe” simply going through our daily lives in Pittsburgh, or elsewhere. When activists claim that poor black and brown communities must not defend themselves against

racist attacks or confront the state, including using illegal or “violent” means, they typically advocate instead the performance of an image of legitimate victimhood for white middle class consumption. The activities of marginalized groups are barely recognized unless they perform the role of peaceful and quaint ethnics who by nature cannot confront power on their own. Fuck reproducing stereotypes of passivity and powerlessness, fuck voting, and fuck not defending our right to land and housing, our right to live without police murdering us!

When activists argue that people should follow "Black leadership,” it is clear that their primary audience for these appeals can only be liberal white activists, and that they understand power as something which is granted or bestowed by the powerful. Appeals to white benevolence to let people of color “lead political struggles” assumes that white activists can somehow relinquish their privilege and legitimacy to oppressed communities and that these communities cannot act and take power for themselves.

And of course it is extremely advantageous to the powers that be for the oppressed to be infantilized and deterred from potentially “unsafe” self-defense, resistance, or attack. The absence of active mass resistance to racist policies and institutions in Pittsburgh and in the US over the last forty years has meant that life conditions have worsened for nearly everyone. Thankfully this is turning around, but it is not because "Black leadership" (largely inadequate here) has led the rallies, it's because Black and other oppressed people have disregarded the orders of these peace police and have written in the streets with fire.

And when it comes to "allies" many of them have been guilted into following false leaders. They have been told and bought into the racist logic of communities of color being single, homogeneous blocs with identical political opinions. Yet for identity politicians or those chasing clout, claiming that they have such a program and homogenizing us helps them build up a white fanbase. This has proven to be fundamentally conservative, silencing, and coercive, especially for people of color who reject that analysis and field of action.

~ IV ~
Pittsburgh as an Example!

After May 30 County Councilwoman Olivia Bennet took to Facebook to decry "white anarchists." The same claim would be echoed by Mayor Bill Peduto and the Chief of Police, Scott Schubert. Nevermind the DADT's published arrests over time, showing the several Black and POC arrested for participating in the rebellion! It became a potent narrative in enforcing social peace. In our experience such misrepresentations were not accidental or isolated incidents but a feature of anti-oppression politics in the city which outlined how, instead of mobilizing people of color, women, and queers for independent action, people of color were erased and interracial coalition-building made impossible intentionally.

Enforcing peace has become part and parcel of every street protest after May 30. The exception of course being the East Liberty protest. At this protest the organizers had chosen to respect the state enforced curfew, ending the rally an hour and a half before the curfew was even due to start at 7:30 PM. One of them started playing "Where is the Love?" by Black Eyed Peas (not joking!) as they hoped the crowd would dissipate. Soon after young Black organizers not affiliated with the main group began urging people who were on the sidewalk to continue, and were soon joined by white anarchists and communists chanting "off the sidewalk, into the streets!" One of the organizers attacked the young Black agitators, telling them that they were being swayed by the white people who joined them. They were summarily dismissed, and correctly so - none of us are too stupid to take advice or criticism from white people, especially those who share our desire for liberation!

By now though, because of the intervention of the identity politicians and pro-electioneering organizers, most Black working class people have left the movement and stopped attending the events! You go to a rally and it is mostly self-identified “white allies” yearning for the approval of prominent organizers. There is no one left to call out the bullshit, because these certified allies are too blinded in recognizing the bullshit, too afraid of being labeled "racists" themselves, or of "centering" their own perspectives. Today the last demonstrations are "Uncivil Saturdays" which, though not bought off and tied to

electioneering, have bought into the same guilting of white people as the road to liberation.

At one event, one of the main organizers, not only left a strobelight on, discomforting epileptics and then later dismissing people asking for not including the strobelight by saying "I ain't your mammie" (because being asked nicely to be a decent person that does not want people to die from seizures is equivalent to being a racialized figure of a Black femme that expends emotional labor on white people's children), but then individually started shining a flashlight on white and Latinx people at the event. "Have you given money to Black femmes this week?" After guilty answers of "no!" filled the sound of the night, the organizer proceeded to tell them they should be giving money to their legal defense before they eat. When one person said that they had overdrawn on his checking account, the organizer told the person that if they had Hulu or Netflix they should cancel it in order to fund their account. Another young organizer proceeded to accuse the white people there of having a capitalist mindset for not giving money [redacted]

The truth is this. Broke white people are not going to be able to aggregate their low wages together to defeat racism and pay reparations, because you can not "buy" away capitalism's need for racialized hierarchies in the first place. Those reparations can only be seized through overthrowing capitalism and taking that back pay back through forcing the corporate and state actors who have profited from the legacy of colonialism and capitalism to pay up. And you can only get those reparations by allying with broke white people to organize to overthrow this system. In fact, hating on poor white people who are coming out and attending your protests consistently is indeed a capitalist mindset!

Organizers who do not support the voting shit must study the tradition of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Lucy Parsons, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Robert F. Williams, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, the Third World Women's Alliance, CONAIE, the indigenous militants of Bolivia in 1990, the militants of Oaxaca in 2006, the Mohawk people in the Municipality of Oka, Tupac Katari, Chris Hani, Nelson Mandela (who led the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe), Emiliano Zapata, Juan "Cheno" Cortina, Jose Rizal, Bhagat Singh, Yuri Kochiyama, Kuwasi Balagoon, DRUM, Assata Shakur, and countless other, who often enlisted the support of white

revolutionaries and saw the path to liberation in the international and national support of all oppressed people.

All must study and grasp that anticolonial struggles are violent and radically unsafe.

Pittsburgh must grasp that, while rituals of cultural affirmation are nice, *they are not what will destroy that which kills us consistently.*

That the terrain of conflict is not within the public discourse, *but is rather with the material infrastructure of this system, and the social hierarchies that both sustain and reproduce it.*

That it's not white radicals who put us in "harm's way," *but often our own self-appointed representatives.*

That those who would build their brand off representing “us,” those who appropriate the iconography of past radical movements and remake it in their own sick image, those who insist that everyone who won’t fall in with their agenda is violating the will of “the” leadership… *they all work for the purpose of perpetuating this system.*

Towards a revolutionary solidarity,

Pittsburgh Radical Perspectives

NO TRESPASSING
DANGER
CONSTRUCTION AREA
KEEP OUT
7 ELEVEN
OPEN
DURING
CONSTRUCTION